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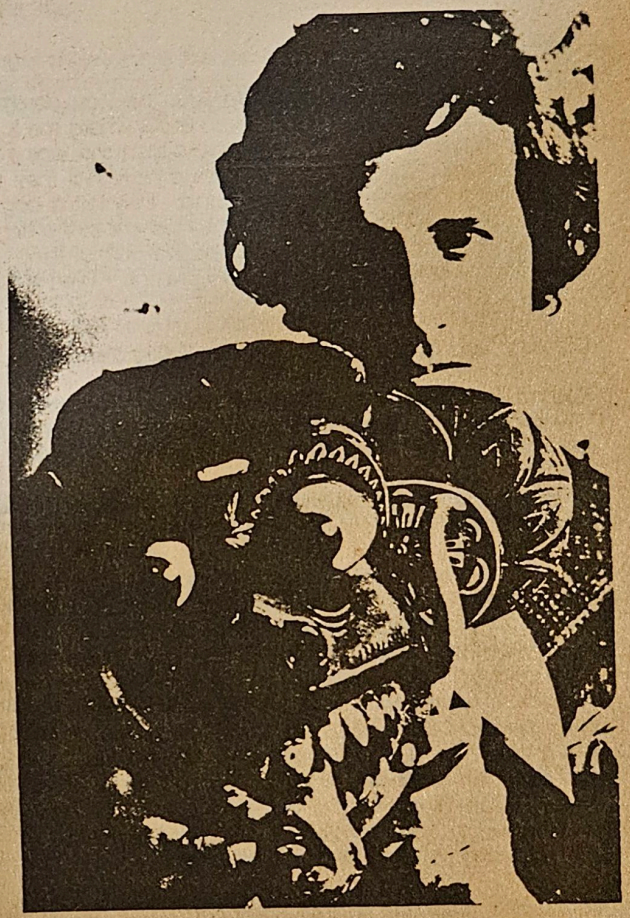
KENNETH ANGER INTERVIEW

Kenneth Anger is certainly one of the most influential and best known experimental filmmakers. His films are still being shown after interest in other underground filmmakers have waned. His influence can still be seen in rock videos and in mainstream blockbusters like Blue Velvet.

Anger has been nearly as successful in the writing field. The two volumes of **Hollywood Babylon** are likely to remain perennial best sellers, and have inspired a host of imitators. Hollywood Babylon is now a phrased used in common language. The first book provided the inspiration for many "Scandals of the Silver Screen" documentaries, including one by Andy Warhol.

Still much about Kenneth Anger is unknown to the public. Strange, considering the standing of some of the people with whom he has associated or collaborated. In the fifties Anger collaborated with Cocteau on a film version of his Jeune Homme et la mort and travelled to Sicily with Dr. Alfred Kinsey to film Aleister Crowley's murals. A selection of his films have been released on video via Mystic Fire Video, a company run by underground filmmaker Sheldon Rochlin.



When I arrived at Anger's New York apartment, he was dressed casually, in a bright red shirt and blue jeans. His front room had a ceiling covered with tiny silver stars, the walls full of vintage movie posters and stills. His dwelling was furnished with Hollywood artifacts; a director's chair with clipboard and a Mickey Mouse telephone where the director took his calls. His prize trophy was an electrically lighted violin from the Busby Berkley musical Gold Diggers of 1933. The adjoining room, his study, was done entirely in red-red walls, furniture and venetian blinds. One wall was draped with the Morroccan flag, red cloth embroidered with green pentagrams. The room was silent except for the flickering of tiny light bulbs in patterned rows across the face of a five pointed star like a marquee. The electric candles on a wooden Valentino shrine was the only other source of light in the room.

In this interview, conducted on two seperate occasions, in 1979 and 1981, we spoke of the sixties and seventies. Movies were not the topic of conversation.

JIM CONDON

You were mentioned in advertisements for a recent book on the Rolling Stones, one devoted a section on your influence on the group. Do you still see the Stones?

Anymore you mean? I used to a lot, but aside from Anita Pallbenberg, the old girlfriend of Keith Richard's, I don't have much contact with them because Mick Jagger travels in the jet set and I despise all that. He invited me to his marriage ten years ago and I hated Bianca immediately because of her vibrations and I said, "No thank you very much, I'll wait and come to the divorce." Which took about ten years to work out, but I knew they were totally incompatible from the beginning. But he's a masochist with women, so that's why he married her.

I read that Anita put a curse on the marriage.

Well so did I!

Have you seen Anita lately?

Not since she had all that hassle with the boy committing suicide and all that, no. I don't even know where she is. She was staying somewhere in New Jersey, then she was staying in upstate New York. They left in such a hurry that they did a terrible thing. They left the pets behind. They left a dog and a cat that were starving because they just got in the car and left. Which is absolutely unforgivable, that sort of thing. You don't forgive anybody that mistreats animals. Even if they're crazy, which she is, slightly.

Did you read *Up and Down with The Rolling Stones* ?

You mean the one by that Spanish chap Tony Sanchez? Well I was going to sue him and I just haven't got around to it because it's really slanderous.

I thought it was very moralistic, but it had a good deal of information-

But it isn't information, it's misinformation in the first place! Spanish Tony, for him to be moralistic, he happens to have been, during the sixties, the leading drug runner and drug connection for heroin, cocaine and hashish in London. For him to act like he's moralistic, the kid should have been thrown in prison. He's a little crook who couldn't work his scam with drugs anymore so he decided to sell his memoirs, first to News of the World, the Sunday Newspaper. So they said, "Why don't you turn it into a book?" They got a ghost writer for him- he's totally illiterate anyway. The whole thing was put together by a ghost writer. I should sue him but it's such a hassle to sue people when you don't have a lot of money.

I think he's prepared for that possibility.

You mean that people will sue him? The Stones haven't, have they?

No, but I hope they do.

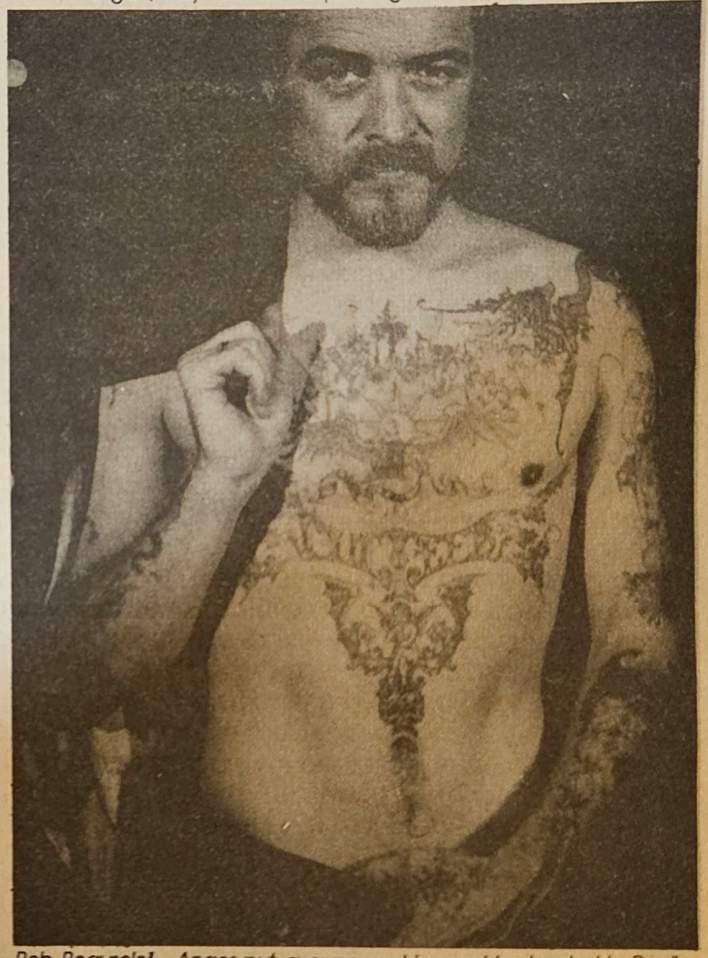
Yes, but you see you could easily blackmail the Stones, he knows a lot about the Stones that isn't in the book. He knows where the bodies are buried, speaking figuratively.

Was there anything that he said about you that you consider-

Well, everything. In the first place I haven't read the book. I saw excerpts from it that were published in News of the World, and I was thinking of suing news of the World. It's such a pile of garbage, it's the worst paper published in England, but they're an extremely rich and powerful organization. It's worse than the National Enquirer. It's been around for fifty years and everything in it- if it isn't slander, it's some kind of innuendo- huge headlines about Princess Margaret sleeping with her chaffeur, something like that. That's the pitch of the whole thing. It's the largest selling newspaper in England. It's the equivalent of what Confidential Magazine used to be here in the fifties. No one really takes it seriously. Now they call me a devil worshipper. Well now this is technically incorrect and it's also libelous. It could also be injurous to my career, in a sense that I may want to give a lecture, which I do with my films, at a Catholic school and they'd say, "We can't let a devil worshipper in our college," and so it's injuring my career. It is also untrue. I am not a devil worshipper. They stated it as a fact. They didn't say "alleged to be" or "rumored to be" they just said he's a devil worshipper. Which is pretty absurd.

Are you still a Thelemite? (Follower of Aleister Crowley)

I have a large collection of Aleister Crowley material. Crowley was an excellent artist. I have one of the world's largest collections of his paintings. Nearly all of them were burned by the Nazis. He sent them to be exhibited in Berlin in the early thirties, the brown shirts went in and said, "This is a degenerate English Artist," which could hardly be denied, what with Crowley's reputation for this and that, plus the fact that he was English, they took all the paintings out in the street and burned



Bob Beausoleil. Anger put a curse on him and he landed in Duell Prison. They're still friends.

them. I'm a member of no organizations because they're all phonies. Every single one of them. They're not legitimate. Anyone can call themselves O.T.O. Crowley didn't pass along a charter to any one of them. Not one of them is legitimate. The only one he thought was a man who is now dead named John Whiteside Parsons, who was a scientist in a Jet Propulsion Lab in California, was going to be his Magickal son and carry on, but he did something Crowley disliked and Crowley disowned him. When he died in 1947-nothing. It was all left up in the air.

How were you first introduced to the work of Aleister Crowley?

It does happen that people are a bit precocious, but on the other hand, until you're thirty, everything that goes through your mind can possibly be just a phase of growing up. It's very rare to have spiritual insights before you're thirty. Though it can rarely happen. I started when I was seventeen or eighteen. I was fortunate enough to know in California, John Parsons, who wrote the Book of Babalon. He was blown up in an

Still from Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome, film by Kenneth Anger: Paul Mathiesen, Kenneth Anger, Renate Druks

accident, murdered by Howard Hughes, that's what I think. He worked for Jet Propulsion laboratories which was connected with Cal Tech in Pasadena. He invented the Rocket fuel for the Saturn Rocket. Then he was blown up at home, in an accident in his basement where he had his own lab.

Are you familiar with Kenneth Grant? (Head of One British OTO)

Well he's the biggest fraud of all. His writings may be interesting, but they're full of hot air. I have a photostat of a letter expelling him by Germer. Kenneth Grant is just a slick sort of journalist, he's in cahoot's with Crowley's enemy, who is John Symonds (Crowley's literary executor).

He had to worm his way to get access to certain documents.

I know, but magicians don't have to worm their way into anything. If he was a real magician, he would have blasted Symonds and Symonds would have dropped dead. At any rate, after the curse that was put on old Grant... who looks exactly like Bela Lugosi-

Have you ever seen him?

Oh yes I know he and his wife Steffi. The reason I decided not to see them anymore in England is that they invited me over for a drink and they gave me canape` sandwiches that had excrement mixed with olives and liver paste. I immediately knew something was wrong with these little sandwiches they were serving and refused to eat them. They were trying to get me hooked as a kind of slave psychically, in a stupid voodoo way, nothing Crowley would touch with a thousand yard stick. putting shit in the food you gave somebody.

Is Jimmy Page doing the soundtrack for Lucifer?

No, we had a quarrel and I fired him because he started to take heroin and I disapproved very strongly of it. It was interferring with what he was doing magickally, so I dismissed him. And then I put a curse on the whole group and the child died and the car crashed and a bunch of bad luck happened for two years. They were sort of half-baked hippie stew. They haven't kept it going like the Stones. I attended one of their concerts once. They put me in the V.I.P. section, which is right up front next to the speakers. They thought they were doing me a favor. My ears rang for an hour afterwards.

What was Page doing Magickally?

Nothing, that was the problem.

I noticed that you put a curse on Bob Beausoleil and he ended up in jail within a year and a half-

Yes that's right. But we're friends again. I've been out to visit him in prison and we correspond. He's in Tracy, California. It's called the Duell Prison. Duell was an early senator in California. I personally wouldn't care to have a prison named after me.

Anger showed me the record of the Lucifer Rising soundtrack that Beausoleil had recorded in Prison. I saw a familiar name. Is that Steve Grogan on guitar who was in the Family?

(CHUCKLES) They're my band of killers.

Anger met Beausoleil during the Haight Ashbury's heyday where he associated with a number of people who would appear in his later films. Beat poets like Lenore Kandel,Harvey Bialy and Michael McClure. He found his first apartment through the novelist Stephen Schenck (The Night Clerk).

I had an apartment in San Francisco where the previous tenant, an artist, had painted in the shadows on the walls to create an optical illusion effect. I dropped acid there once. It was a very strange experience.

Through Michael McClure you met Frewheelin' Frank, treasurer of the Hell's Angels. Did you ever bring Frank to the church of Satan?

I brought Frank to some of the open meetings, but I don't know where he is now. The Hell's Angels have become just like the Mafia. If you do something they don't like, they kill you...

Did you design your letterhead?

It's a specific statue of Ramses in Luxor. Yes, of course I designed it. But the airbrush work was done by Page Wood, who is a good friend of mine. He's a cover artist for the National Lampoon and other magazines. But he has the airbrush and he followed my rough sketch.

You are of Cuban descent?

Half cuban, half German. When I say half, I mean there's much more German than there is Cuban. Cuban Grandmother and the rest is German.

I've noticed that you have at least 2 different birthdates.

Well, that's only 2. Most people who work in films have about four. I think Merle Oberon, when she died, had at least four different birthdays. In other words it's deliberate, it's not an accident. One of the biggest things I share with Aleister Crowley is a certain very special sense of humour. My whole life has been based on that. The practical joke is not unknown in my modus operandi. That's precise enough. It's possible that I don't want my precise birthday out for astrological reasons. I'm February 3rd. I was born at midnight, that makes me a Scorpio, according to California where I was born. My ascendant is Scorpio and my sun sign is Aquarius. That much anybody can find out. But there are more precise things that I prefer to keep secret. There's about three people in the world who would know what to do with them.

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